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Art of the Maya civilization :




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MAYA

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Art of the MAYA *civilization*

Exhibition—September 4 to October 5, 1957
at the

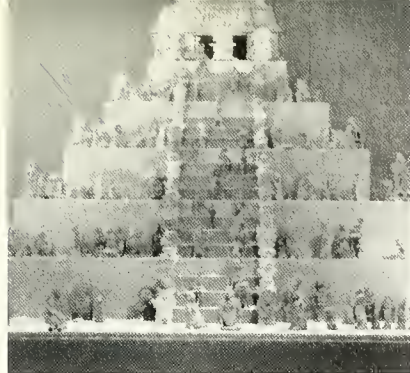
Martin Widdifield Gallery
818 Madison Avenue
New York



1435
A4
M37



*Seated Priest
with Jaguar beaddress
Hollow painted clay
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
16½" tall*



Foreword

Of all the civilizations in the ancient New World that of the Maya has received most attention and is thus most widely known. This interest has been generated chiefly by extensive investigations of their magnificent ceremonial sites that are unequalled in the Western hemisphere. One wanders through these ruins as through a museum, experiencing fresh aesthetic thrills at every turn as the eye feasts upon sculptural renderings of unequalled variety and vitality.

The Mayas during their golden age that approximates the first 1,000 years A.D. were the masters of ancient American art. This mastery is evident in their jade work, stone and clay sculpture, fresco wall painting, and in the design and decoration of religious centers. An indication of superb textile and feather work can be seen by examining the vestments adorning the clay ceremonial burial figurines and by referring to illustrations of the frescos. Actual objects of art such as polychrome pottery, stone sculpture, and clay figures from the Maya area are exceedingly rare and coveted.

In spite of the large area of production and lengthy time span of occupation, relatively few significant burial grounds which yield such material have been found. One of prime importance is that on the Island of Jaina off the coast of Campeche in the gulf of Mexico. Most of the exhibition objects come from this region. It has been suggested that this island served as a royal cemetery for a large mainland area and it should be noted that throughout the Americas only graves of important personages yield objects of high artistic merit. Jaina is famous for its polychrome pottery and exquisite miniature terracotta figurines, many of which function as rattles or whistles. These figures include a diversity of subject matter: birds, animals, rulers, priests, priestesses, warriors, royal attendants, god-like representations, and even attitudes illustrating menial daily labors. All of this was to provide for the necessities of the deceased in kind or spirit in afterlife.

The present exhibition features one of the largest collections of these pieces in existence, together with a selection of stone carvings and ceramics from the general Maya area.

ALFRED EARL STENDAHL

TABLE OF MAYA HISTORY

- I. Formative: 752 B.C.-60 A.D.
*Twilight observation on the ecliptic—
invention of writing
and counting.*
- II. First Empire: 60-629 A.D.
*Theocrats in city states
who are deified at death—
astronomical controls.*
- III. Revolution against
Theocracy: 629-708 A.D.
*Abandonment of the great
cities in civil wars.*
- IV. Maya Renaissance: 708-960 A.D.
*Partial reoccupations under
democratic government;
retaining important features
of the old civilization but
with new forms in architecture
and sculptural art
in central Yucatan.*
- V. Second Empire: 960-1191 A.D.
*Chichen Itza founded
under native lords after
abandonment of central Yucatan—
Uxmal and other cities founded.*
- VI. The League of Mayapan: 1191-1417 A.D.
*Refuge city for the Maya.
Toltec dynasties survived
in Yucatan after
downfall on the highlands.*
- VII. Decadence and Conquest: 1460-1541 A.D.
*League of Mayapan dissolved;
Mayas seek old home in
Chichen Itza etc.; Spanish conquest
begins 1527, ends with
the founding of Merida in 1541.*

Companionship with the past, with far places and outlandish peoples is best accomplished through the representative fine arts. Music and dancing, under folk conditions, do not come to us naively as sound or motion. Take the Ode to a Grecian Urn by John Keats. Inspired by scenes on Attic pottery, it recreates experience. "Heard melodies are sweet," he says, "But those unheard are sweeter." Now, the Maya have been called the Greeks of the New World. The comparison holds as regards cultural quality on several social levels. Also the Toltecs, who conquered the Maya, safely may be compared to the Romans who enslaved the Greeks after taking over much of their civilization. Keats closed his poem on the Grecian Urn with a summation which in itself is an induction pure and simple. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know."

That goes far beyond Plato whose art was simply measurement. Today it is easily demonstrated that both nature and man repeatedly seek the convergence of use and beauty—the practical and the esthetic, that is—to achieve through stream-lining the highest utility and the greatest beauty.

In 1839 and 1841 John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood brought vivid-

ly before the world the great civilization of the Maya in Central America, a civilization of stone built cities of exact science and creative economics. In words and pictures they restored a social illusion destined to enrich mankind.

"We are not warranted," wrote Stephens, "In going back to any ancient nation of the Old World for the builders of these cities: they are not the work of the people who have passed away and whose history is lost, but . . . are the creations of the same races who inhabited the country at the time of the Spanish conquest or some not very distant progenitors."

I cannot omit entirely the long continuity of dates properly historical nor the extension of this into past and future time. Astronomical chronology is a major subject of Maya art. Three total eclipses, two of the sun, with central tracks across Maya territory lead to a total lunar eclipse, all in 872 days. These are: Nov. 10, 752 B.C.; May 6, 751 B.C.; and April 1, 749 B.C. This alignment of phenomena on the ecliptic inaugurates the famous "Tzolkin," in which 13 numbers combine with 20 names in a permutation.

The next station of a throughway centers on a mass conjunction of five planets on Dec. 11, 580 B.C. and the organization of interrelated calendars. A solar year

starts at the winter solstice and an agricultural year starts in the spring 140 days later and concerns Venus.

It is not until October 14, 58 A.D. that an integration is produced on three sorts of years counting back 3430 tropical years from Oct. 14, 58 A.D. to Oct. 14, 3373 B.C., (the point of time called Maya zero) this was done by sighting forward and in reverse to get four stations in the year combining April 13, and Sept. 6 in the West and March 7 and Oct. 14, in the East. This "reciprocal alignment" works magic in the exact correlation of all sorts of astronomical periods.

An important simplification took place on February 11, 176 A.D. not immediately effective, however. On September 2, 502 A.D. an astronomical congress was held at Copan. After this Sun worshippers and Venus worshippers drew apart. Actually science was clarified in a poverty stricken Maya Renaissance which ultimately produced new architecture of magnificent quality. A new abandonment of cities was caused by arrival from the far north of the Uto-Aztec hordes, the Olmecs about 950 A.D., the Toltecs about 1090 A.D. and the Aztecs in 1324 A.D. Maya civilization ultimately transformed them all. The last fine work of art of the Maya, established briefly in Chichen Itza,

is dated February 17, 1417 A.D. The recent discovery that the buried temple at Holmul was the tomb of Huetzin Tepeul, father of Quetzalcoatl by a noble Maya woman, clears much confusion in new world history.

Dated stones and monuments of rulers or deities do not appear until 68 A.D. when the First Empire began. These monuments to theocrats have wonderful calligraphic inscriptions and portrait realism honoring dead rulers transformed into gods. The downfall of the great Theocracy came in 629 A.D. The great cities were abandoned until 708 A.D. when the Maya Renaissance got under way with wooden houses later copied in stone and mortar. Temple building is revived but less massive with towers that are compressed pyramids. The artists became less concerned with theocrats and more concerned with the personalities of everyday men and women of the Maya scene. These are handled in a cult of figurines.

The prototype of the Maya mold-made figurine may be the bulbous whistle. Necessarily hollow, this little object lends itself to plastic decoration with a human or animal body on the molded front. The back, added separately to preserve the cavity, has a mouthpiece and several finger holes which likewise are vents required

during firing. From first to last many figurines are whistles or rattles for funeral music. Ultimately some were modeled as portraits of the dead person. On an engraved peccary skull, found in Tomb 1 at Copan, Honduras, and dated 322 A.D. we see, among various animal subjects, Death carrying a mummy bundle and blowing a whistle with three holes.

Realistic figurines, exquisitely modeled and molded in clay by ancient Maya artists of the Mexican State of Campeche, are records of the habits and appearances of ordinary individuals for the most part. It seems these portrait figurines belong to a cult of continued spiritual existence for all men and women which replaced, or supplemented, an earlier Maya religion in which rulers became gods. The earliest centers of figurine manufacture were Piedras Negras and Palenque, whence the craft moved south to the highland plateau above the Usumacinta valley and north into western parts of the peninsula of Yucatan. Portrait figures did not take hold in other important First Empire cities, such as Copan, Uaxactun, and Tikal. The fine specimens found on the Guatemalan highlands and in Campeche must be dated well subsequent to the First Empire although carrying ideas then developed.

The beautiful figurines of Campeche

were not made to buy and sell as artistic bric-a-brac: they were not meant to serve as puerile dolls and playthings; they were not intended to be kept in closets or placed on altars as family mementos. Instead, they were either manufactured hastily for a dead person to clutch against his breast in common flexed burial or they were made with more leisure and care to be placed with bones or ashes in urns, along with sacred jewels, whistles, rattles, knives and needles.

They are beautiful even when the subject is homely, because emotion guided the hand of the artist. They are tokens of personality intended, let us say, as identifying pictures on a passport to eternity. This motive, in one form or another, is well nigh universal since purposeful burial became a human practice. Spiritual counterparts of dead men and women continued to exist—so primitive man thought and still thinks—demanding service and giving service. Souls dissolved into vague magical influences when disembodied, or they freely entered into and inhabited plants, animals, rocks, streams, clouds, and stars, till all nature became sensitive and animate.

It is a mistake to think that only the grandiose and overwhelming aspects of any artistic civilization are worthy of ad-

miration. I like figurines because they have personality and cultural warmth. They are often beautiful but without pretention because character conquers physiognomy.

HERBERT JOSEPH SPINDEN, explorer, anthropologist, teacher and writer, has had a profound influence in shaping a generation's understanding of Amerindian cultures. The "Grand Old Man" of American anthropology, he has devoted a lifetime to exploring the fabulous heritage of pre-Columbian civilizations on the American Continent.

As curator of *American Indian Art and Primitive Culture* at the Brooklyn Museum, Dr. Spinden has introduced countless museum-goers to the fascinations of the American past. Through his absorbing interest in Maya and Aztec art—acquired in explorations in search of ruined cities in the Central American jungle—he solved the chronology of Maya inscriptions, their civil calendar and the Venus calendar. In books, magazines and numerous papers, he has ranged over the entire field of American anthropology, from the Mandan Indians to the Toltecs.

Before joining the Brooklyn Museum, Dr. Spinden was assistant curator of the American Museum of Natural History and curator of the Peabody Museum and the Buffalo Museum of Arts and Sciences. He is a past president of the Explorers Club and the American Anthropological Association, and is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

*Seated costumed Ruler
on throne-like platform
with bowl at feet
Painted clay
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico 10" tall*



Seated Priestess
Hollow painted
clay whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
9" tall

Seated Figure
with shell pendant
and facial tattoo
Painted clay whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ " tall

Standing Man
Hollow painted
clay whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
7 $\frac{1}{4}$ " tall



Seated Figure
Hollow painted
clay whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
7 1/4" tall

Seated Woman
Hollow painted
clay whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
8" tall

*Seated Priest with headdress
and facial tattoo*
Hollow painted clay whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
9" tall



Seated Figure in loin cloth
Hollow painted
clay whistle
Island of Jaina.
Campeche, Mexico
7" tall

Seated Man with facial tattoo
Hollow painted
clay whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
8" tall

Seated Man
Hollow clay
whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
7 3/4" tall



Seated Priestess
Hollow painted
clay wistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
7½" tall



Standing Woman
Hollow painted
clay wistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
5" tall



Standing Woman
Solid
painted clay
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
6½" tall



Standing Figure
Hollow clay
rattle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
7½" tall



Seated Ruler on Throne
with glyph panels
Painted clay
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
9½" tall





*Carved clay bowl
with Ceremonial scenes
in two panels
From State of
Chiapas
6 3/4" tall
4 3/4" diameter*



*Clay flask
with relief of Seated Priest
in feathered headdress
Yucatan, Mexico
3" tall*



*Bowl—made in mold
in two halves
Figures in ceremonial attire
Classic Veracruz style
related to Mayan
from Central Veracruz
4½" tall 6¾" diameter*



*Painted clay plate
Seated priest
State of Campeche,
Mexico
11½" diameter*



*Carved pot
Yucatan, Mexico
7" tall
6 1/4" diameter*



*Painted Plate
with four breast
rattle supports
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
6 1/2" tall 13 3/4" diameter*



Painted clay plate
Priest in bird costume
and glyph ring
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
14½" diameter



Carved clay goblet
Conventionalized designs
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
7" tall
4" diameter



*Seated Ruler on throne
Painted clay
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
8 1/4" tall*



*Standing figure
wearing yoke
Hollow clay whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
6" tall*



*Standing priest
in elaborate costume
Hollow painted
clay whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico 8" tall*



*Standing figure
Hollow clay rattle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
8 1/2" tall*



*Standing figure
with bird headdress
Hollow painted clay
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
5 1/4" tall*

*Standing Figure
with snake headdress
Hollow painted clay whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
6" tall*

*Standing woman
with flower headdress
Hollow painted
clay rattle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
9" tall*

*Standing Mother and Child
with bowl on head
Hollow painted clay rattle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
7" tall*



*Torso of Doll
with places for
moveable arms and legs
Hollow clay
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico 7½" tall*

*Ruler seated
on canopied dais
Painted clay
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
11½" tall*

*Ruler seated on throne
Painted clay
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
8¼" tall*

*Standing woman
holding incense bag
Hollow painted clay rattle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
6½" tall*



*Standing fat man
Hollow painted
clay rattle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
5 1/4" tall*

*Seated figure
wearing mask
Hollow painted
clay rattle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
6 1/2" tall*

*Standing figure
Hollow clay rattle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
6" tall*

*Standing Mother and child
Hollow painted
clay rattle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
7" tall*



*Head and torso
with glyphs
Limestone
Campeche, Mexico
24" tall*

*Turtle with human head
in mouth
Limestone
Yucatan, Mexico
5 1/4" tall
11 1/4" long*

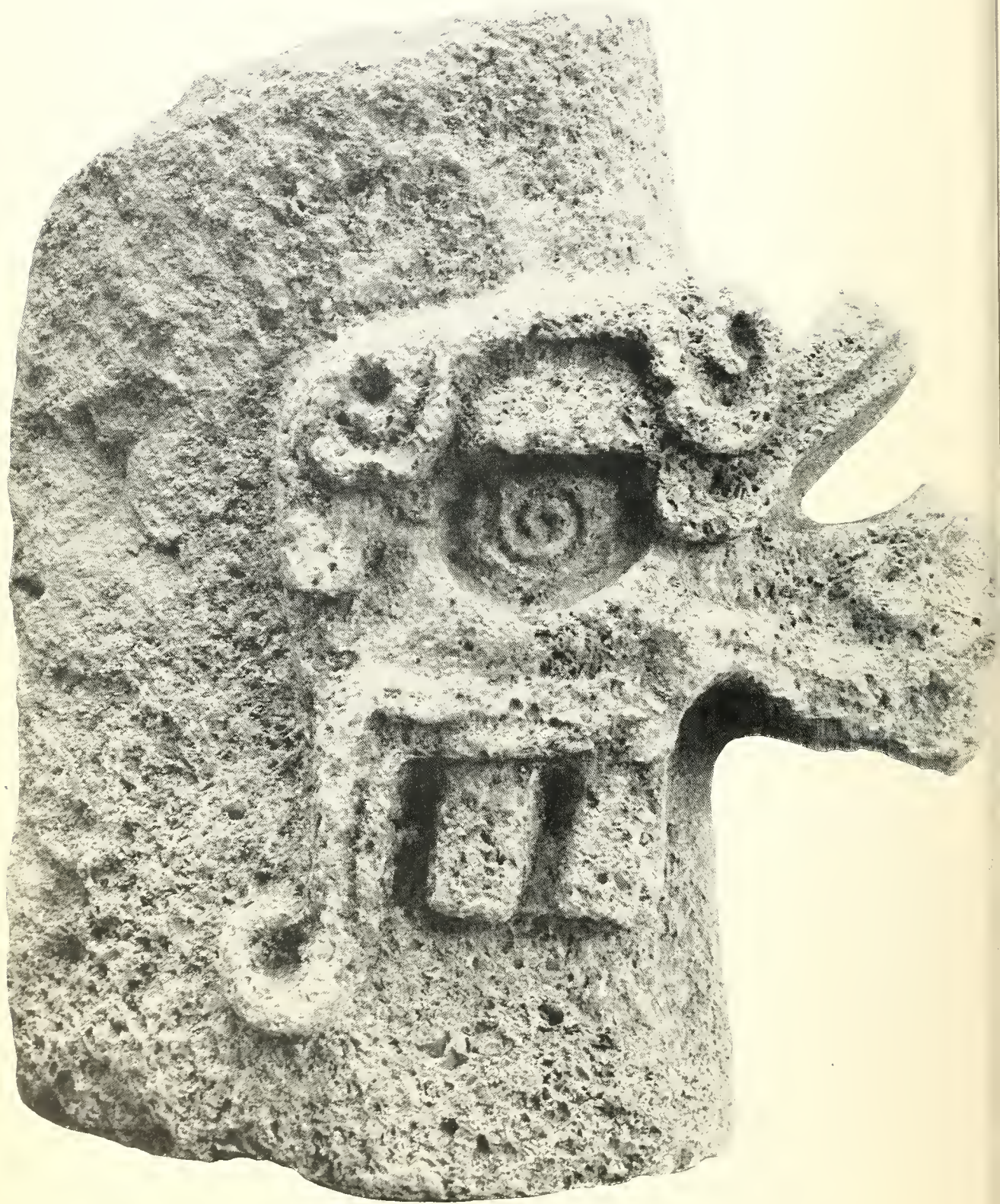


*Head of Chacmool
Limestone
Yucatan, Mexico
7" tall*

*Temple ornament
three alligator-
like animals
Limestone
Campeche, Mexico
10½" tall 29" long*







*Temple decoration
probably Tlaloc
(Rain God) representation
Limestone
Campeche, Mexico
20 1/2" tall*

*Temple decoration
two glyphs
Limestone
11" tall 24" long
Campeche, Mexico*



Monster
Hollow painted
clay whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
5" tall



Reclining dog
Hollow painted
clay whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
4 1/4" tall



*Seated figure
in animal costume*
Hollow painted
clay whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico 4 1/4" tall



Animal
Hollow painted
clay whistle
Island of Jaina,
Campeche, Mexico
7" tall



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